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ACTIVITY 7

Summary

Write a paragraph explaining the impact of such a diverse population on the Russian Empire. Ensure you consider social, political, economic and cultural impacts. Use evidence from the map and additional written evidence to support your answer.

Marxism in Imperial Russia

Karl Marx: 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'

In the late nineteenth century many revolutionary groups began to emerge. Led by liberal nobles and a small, but growing, middle class, these groups viewed revolution as the only way forward for Russia. Two German authors, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, came to prominence in 1848 with their work entitled *The Communist Manifesto*. Drawing on a study of the working people of Britain to explain the sequence of human history, the work outlined a new ideology (later called Marxism) exploring the notion of history as a series of class struggles that would inevitably lead to the demise of capitalism and the rise of communism.

The Communist Manifesto advocated a scientific study of human society. The authors asserted that history was made up of a series of struggles between those with political power and those without. Depending on the situation, the type of struggle might change, but the ongoing conflict, the dialectic, continued. Marx and Engels argued that the final stage of the class struggle would be the industrial era. This emboldened revolutionaries in the late nineteenth century, who believed the proletariat (industrial working class) would come to challenge, and eventually overcome, the bourgeoisie (those who owned the means of production, i.e. the capitalists).

Those who supported the Marxist view were joined by other political groups who had emerged in opposition to tsarism. Groups such as the liberals and the Populists rose in prominence during the 1890s, along with smaller, more extreme groups (See Chapter 2). Supporters of Nihilism, such as students, revolutionaries and writers, resorted to terrorism during this period in an attempt to destroy the imperial regime. Splinter groups also emerged, such as the People's Will and the Union of Liberation, with the leaders living lives of secrecy to avoid exile to Siberia. Many of these groups and their ideas were to form the basis for the anti-tsarist political groups of the early twentieth century.

DOCUMENT:

Extract from Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

[T]he bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society...The essential conditions for the existence...of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry...replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition...The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.²⁰



Karl Marx.

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ACTIVITY 8

Research Task

Using this book and at least THREE other sources, explain the effect of *The Communist Manifesto* on Russia in the late nineteenth century. Structure your response in three or four separate paragraphs, with each paragraph addressing a different school of historiographical thought.

ACTIVITY 9

Summary

In 500 words, explain the concept of Marxism as you understand it.

ACTIVITY 10

Analysis

In 500 words, discuss how geography, demography and social tensions contributed to a revolutionary situation in Russia before 1904.

Modernisation and industrialisation

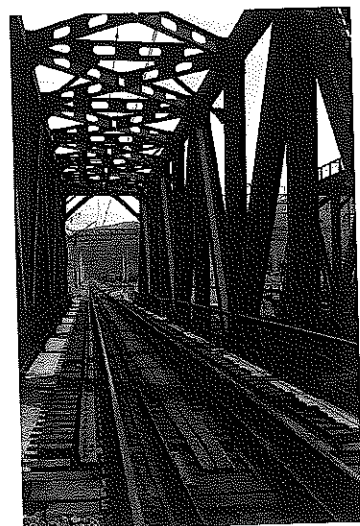
Sergei Witte: 'The minister of finance recognises that the customs duties fall as a particularly heavy burden upon the impoverished landowners and peasants, particularly in a year of crop failure. These imposts are a heavy sacrifice made by the entire population, and not from surplus but out of current necessity.'

While Alexander III was generally opposed to social and political reform, believing it had the potential to undermine autocracy, he was committed to modernising Russia through industrialisation. Following his death from kidney disease in 1894 and the ascension of his son Nicholas II (1894-1917), this commitment was continued, along with the preservation of absolute autocracy. Since the 1870s industrialisation had been pursued as a distinct



DID YOU KNOW?

The Putilov Steel Works, one of the largest industrial enterprises in St. Petersburg, employed around 40 000 workers!



A section of the Trans-Siberian railway.

government policy and this was further enhanced in the 1890s. For the tsarist government, industrialisation was the key to promoting military growth and strength; however, the impact of rapid industrialisation was to reach far more widely than the military. The period known as the 'great spurt' saw substantial industrialisation take place under the guidance of Sergei Witte (1893-1903), Minister for Finance, who was presented with the task of modernising Imperial Russia in line with Western European standards.

Witte employed foreign advisors and workers to counsel him in industrial planning and techniques. His task was not only to modernise Russia but to protect local industries. Witte believed that the only way he could balance this incredible task was to foster a system of state-run capitalism, whereby entrepreneurial principles were employed while the state retained overall control.

The 'great spurt' brought about a great deal of economic reform. Foreign capital was encouraged, to facilitate the growth of the Empire's natural resources and the development of industry. Russia relied heavily on foreign loans to develop its economy in this way. The national currency, the rouble, was placed on the gold standard in 1897 in the hope of promoting a stable currency and in turn, promoting foreign investment. Witte ensured foreign goods were limited on the Russian market and protected local industry through imposing hefty government tariffs. Despite enabling considerable industrial development, these reforms had many adverse impacts on ordinary Russians. With rapid modernisation came rising prices, taxes and interest rates – burdens difficult to bear for most people, particularly those in rural areas. Throughout the period of industrialisation the primary livelihood of the majority, agriculture, remained unprotected and undeveloped.

Investment in railways during the 'great spurt' was central to the idea of modernisation. The standout example of this progression is the Trans-Siberian railway (constructed from 1891 onwards), designed to connect the isolated regions of central and eastern Russia with the industrialised west. It was hoped this project would enable further east-west migration, bolstering the industrial workforce. The railway project remained unfinished at the outbreak of war in 1914, perhaps a stark reminder of a failed attempt to modernise a technologically unsophisticated nation.

While production and trade figures certainly indicate substantial industrial development comparable to European standards, conservative and radical opponents of Witte argued that his reforms were too dependent on foreign capital and too focussed on the development of heavy industry, ignoring the modernisation of light industry and agriculture. This was refuted by Witte, who argued that foreign capital directly enhanced Russia's production, and thus its wealth. Whatever the case, the task of rapidly industrialising an antiquated empire which was resistant to change, within the context of preserving the institution of absolute autocracy, proved to be of great difficulty for the tsarist government.

Industrialisation throughout the 1890s came at a time of world-wide industrial boom; however, this was swiftly followed by world-wide recession, taking a significant human toll on Imperial Russia. This, combined with the failure to meet rising class expectations, led to growing public discontent with the regime; discontent that would later contribute to revolutionary action in 1905. Throughout the late nineteenth century, harsh agricultural conditions coupled with the financial burden of land ownership, following the Emancipation Edict of 1861, saw many peasants flock to the industrial

centres in search of work. Many peasants had realised they could no longer bear the financial burden of life on the land, resulting in a significant rise in the urban population of Imperial Russia. This migration to the urban centres provided a ready-made industrial labour force, facilitating the desired growth of industry.

Between 1860 and 1905 the industrial labour force trebled, with this new group being employed in large-scale units in primitive factories. Very little emphasis was placed on the modernisation of machinery, thereby maximising profit for a newly-emerging commercial class through a low-cost labour force, while allowing appalling conditions for the industrial workers. With the absence of legal workplace protections and the prohibition of trade unions, rapid industrialisation through the exploitation of an oppressed industrial working class was enabled.

The unsupervised and unplanned growth of these industrial centres led to severe overcrowding. Living conditions were understandably poor, with on average sixteen people living in one apartment and six people in one room in 1904. It was in these overcrowded centres that political discontent began to stir, seeing the number of military-suppressed industrial strikes grow from nineteen in 1893 to 522 in 1902. When recession hit, widespread unemployment followed. Peasant hopes for a better life, this time in the urban centres, had again been squashed, leading to a growth in social unrest that over time would develop into a revolutionary response.

STATISTICS

Growth of population in Russia's two main cities

	St Petersburg	Moscow
1881	928,000	753,500
1890	1,033,600	1,038,600
1897	1,264,700	1,174,000
1900	1,439,600	1,345,000
1910	1,905,600	1,617,700
1914	2,217,500	1,762,700

Industrial output in the Russian Empire (base unit of 100 in 1900)

1900	100	1909	122.5
1904	109.5	1911	149.7
1905	98.2	1912	153.2
1906	111.7	1913	163.6

Growth in national product 1898-1913

Italy - 82.7%	Austria - 79%	Britain - 40%
Germany - 84.2%	France - 59.6%	Russia - 96.8%

Source: Michael Lynch, *Reaction and Revolutions: Russia 1881-1924* (Hodder and Stoughton: Oxford, 2000), 20-21.